

NCAA FOOTBALL RULES COMMITTEE ACTION FOR 2008

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Introduction

In making its recommendations for rules changes in 2008, the NCAA Football Rules Committee retained its focus on *player safety* and *consistency of making the ball ready for play*. The committee also has slightly expanded the types of plays allowable for instant replay review, broadened the head coach's ability to challenge a ruling, and made some changes in the administration of the game.

The changes summarized below have been adopted by the NCAA Football Rules Committee and approved by the Playing Rules Oversight Panel (PROP), which has jurisdiction over the rules committees for all sports.

Rules Changes

1. Player Safety.

Helmet Crown and Defenseless Players (Rule 9-1-3). The committee has refined the rules regarding the use of the helmet as a weapon and the targeting of defenseless players. (The Points of Emphasis section of the *NCAA Football Rules and Interpretations* lists a number of examples of defenseless players.) Emphasis on these actions highlights concern about potentially debilitating injuries. It is now a foul when a player targets an opponent and initiates contact with the crown (top) of the helmet. This rule is intended primarily for the safety of the player who initiates the contact. It is also a foul if a player targets a defenseless opponent and initiates contact above the shoulders. **Each of these is a personal foul and thus carries a 15-yard penalty.**

Chop Block (Rule 2-3-3). The definition of the chop block has been simplified to assist in the understanding of this rule and to encourage more consistent officiating. A chop block is now defined as a high-low or low-high combination block by any two players against an opponent (other than the runner) anywhere on the field, with or without a delay between contacts. The "low" component is at the opponent's thigh or below. **A dangerous action that can lead to serious injury, the chop block is a personal foul that carries a 15-yard penalty.**

"Horse-Collar" Tackle (Rule 9-1-2-p). With this new rule, the committee addresses the potential hazard to a ball carrier that is grabbed by the inside collar of the jersey or shoulder pad and quickly jerked down. The rule prohibits all players from grabbing the inside back collar of the shoulder pads or jersey, or the inside collar of the side of the shoulder pads or jersey, and immediately pulling the runner down. This does not apply to a runner who is inside the tackle box or to a quarterback who is in the pocket. A key element is the immediacy of the runner being pulled down, because of the risk of injury. **The horse-collar tackle is a personal foul and the penalty is 15 yards.**

Face-Mask Foul (Rule 9-1-2-q). There is no longer a foul if any player grabs an opponent's face mask *without* pulling, twisting, or turning it. The five-yard penalty has been eliminated. This change does not change the safety aspect of this rule. **Pulling, twisting, or turning an opponent's face mask remains a personal foul with a 15-yard penalty.**

2. Timing.

40-Second Play Clock (Rule 3-2-4). The 40-second play clock represents a major change in the timing of the game and will impact how the game looks and flows. The purpose of this change is to enhance the consistency of how soon the ball is ready for play once it has become dead. In the past, the play clock was set at 25 seconds and started on the referee's signal on every play. Now, the play clock will be set to **40 seconds** after the ball becomes dead on **every play** and started immediately. In circumstances when the officials stop the game clock for administrative and other reasons, the play clock will be set to 25 seconds and started on the referee's signal in the familiar manner. The 25-second clock will be in effect for:

1. Penalty administration.
2. Charged team timeout.
3. Media timeout.
4. Injury timeout.
5. Measurement.
6. Change of possession.
7. Following a kick.
8. Score.
9. Start of each period.
10. Start of a team's series in extra period.
11. Instant replay review.
12. Other administrative stoppage.

Also, the committee has eliminated the 15-second play clock which was used following television timeouts.

Ball Out Of Bounds (Rule 3-2-5-a-12). When a ball is carried or fumbled out of bounds, the game clock will stop, as always. Beginning in 2008 the game clock will start on the referee's signal when the ball is ready for play, not on the snap. In the last two minutes of the half, however, the clock will start on the snap as before, preserving the ability of the offensive team to maximize strategic use of the clock.

3. Instant Replay.

Reviewable Plays. The new rules expand the range of plays for which the replay official may stop the game to review. These include certain field goal attempts, plays where the ball carrier is ruled down and a loose ball is immediately recovered, and plays where the ball carrier is ruled out of bounds when he immediately carries the ball across the goal line.

Field Goal Attempts (Rule 12-3-1-a). A field goal attempt may be reviewed only if the ball is ruled below or above the crossbar, or inside or outside the uprights when it is lower than the top of the uprights. If the ball is higher than the top of the uprights, the play may not be reviewed.

Ball Carrier Ruled Down (Rule 12-3-3-b). When a ball carrier is judged down by rule and the ball is fumbled, the play may be reviewed if the recovery of the ball occurs in the immediate action following the fumble and is prior to any official signaling that the ball is dead. However, if the replay official does not have indisputable video evidence as to which player recovers the fumble, the ruling of down-by-rule stands. If the call of down-by-rule is reversed, the ball belongs to the recovering player at the spot of the recovery and no advance is allowed.

Ball Carrier Ruled Down Near The Goal Line (Rule 12-3-3-c). When a ball carrier is ruled out of bounds, the play may be reviewed if his immediate action takes him into the opponent's end zone and is prior to any official signaling that the ball is dead.

Head Coach's Challenge (Rule 12-5-1-b). A new rule expands the ability of a head coach to challenge a reviewable ruling on the field. The head coach now retains a challenge if his initial challenge is successful and thus results in a reversal by the replay official. The coach will then still have a single challenge that he may use anytime during the game if his team has not used all its timeouts. Thus a team may have a total of two challenges in the game, but only if the first results in a reversal of the on-field ruling.

4. Game Administration.

Sideline Infraction (Rule 9-1-6). The committee has changed the rule regarding sideline personnel being in the restricted area, which is between the sideline and the coaching box. The former sideline *warning* has given way to a sideline *infraction* which carries an immediate yardage penalty. The first two infractions have a five-yard delay of game penalty, and the third and subsequent violations now carry a 15-yard penalty for unsportsmanlike conduct.

Obtaining Opponent's Signals (Rule 1-4-9-g). The rules now prohibit any attempt to record, either by video or audio means, the signals given by an opposing player, coach, or other team personnel. Violations should be brought to the attention of the proper disciplinary authority.